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ABSTRACT

During February 1975, a survey was sent to all current members of the American Association for Higher Education; 1,701 surveys were returned. The instrument was designed to give members' respondents to a wide variety of contemporary issues in higher education. Items to which well over 1,000 respondents answered affirmatively were: (1) Institutions of higher education should provide prospective students with accurate information regarding employment in their chosen fields. (2) Most students would benefit from an extended period of time away from formal schooling. (3) Students today are generally more sophisticated about an institution's relevance to their economy, current student aid policies make it harder for the middle class to go to college than either the very rich or the very poor. (5) As admissions standards are lowered, academic standards are likely to become lower too. (6) Female students should not be excluded from the military academies because of their sex. (7) Of the potential useful research conducted in higher edication, very little is ever applied. Additional findings indicating both positive and negative issues and a copy of the survey showing total responses to each item are included. (MJM)

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KEY ISSUES: A SURVEY OF AAHE MEMBERS

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During February 1975, a survey was sent to all current members of the American Association for Higher Education; 1701 surveys were returned. The instrument was designed to give member responses to a wide variety of contemporary issues in higher education. In this summary, we will deal first with the characteristics of the respondents, and then with some of the more interesting findings regarding the issues themselves. A copy of the survey, showing total responses to each item is attached.

THE RESPONDENTS

By age, our respondents were heavily in the 30- to 50-years-old categories, with 193 being from 20 to 30 years of age, 532 from 31 to 40, 525 from 41 to 50, 341 from 51 to 60, and 96 who were over 60. Their sex was overwhelmingly male; 1295 male responses and 375 female. It should be noted here that not all of the respondents filled out all of these items describing themselves, and the totals here are slightly under 1701.

In terms of the type of institution our respondents came from, they were heavily (947) from the public sector, with 421 from Independent, 224 from denominational, and 76 from non-degree granting institutions. It is very interesting to note the large number of respondents who were from institutions granting advanced degrees. Eighty-eight indicated their institutions granted no degrees, 185 granted the A.A., 275 granted the B.A., 347 granted the M.A., and 757 came from institutions that granted either the Ph.D. or the Ed.D.

As far as professional role is concerned, again the domination of administrators in the AAHE membership seems to come through in the questionnaire returns. One thousand one hundred thirty-four respondents were administrators, compared to 82 department chairmen, 92 professors of higher education, 112 professors of other disciplines, 66 engaged in higher education research, 88 graduate students, and 24 professors of elementary or secondary education. If this survey response is a reasonable profile of the membership of AAHE, the association member tends to be under 50, male, from a public institution offering the doctorate degree, and is most likely an administrator.

THE RESPONSES

On a fair number of issues, the responses were almost unanimous. The items to which well over 1000 respondents answered affirmatively were as follows:

--Institutions of higher education should provide prospective students with accurate information regarding employment in their chosen fields, with 1500 agreeing.

--Most students would benefit from an extended period of time away from formal schooling, with 1100 agreeing.

--Students today are generally more sophisticated about an institution's relevance to their training and future employment than they were ten years ago, with 1092 agreeing.

--Given the state of the economy, current student aid policies make it harder for the middle class to go to college than either the very rich or the very poor, with 1368 agreeing.

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--As admissions standards are lowered, academic standards are likely to become lower too, with 1103 agreeing.

--Female students should not be excluded from the military academies because of their sex, 1321 agreeing.

--Of the potential useful research conducted in higher education, very little is ever applied, with 1273 agreeing.

--Faculty tenure systems should be replaced by renewable contract systems, 1152 agreeing.

--Grading on the curve is not a fair way to measure learning, 1136 agreeing.

--All degree-granting institutions should have procedures for accrediting life experiences, with 1106 agreeing.

These items suggest that the new vocationalism, so-called, has received considerable credibility from the people who filled out this questionnaire (remember, they are mostly administrators). It also appears that institutions need to become more accurate in terms of their procedures for recording student experiences and more realistic in terms of the way they transfer these experiences into credits. Also called into question are some of the cherished notions about grading. Interestingly enough, almost a thousand respondents feel that standard letter grades are still the most useful way to evaluate student performance, but 1100 feel that grading on the curve is not a fair way to measure learning. The questionnaire doesn't indicate how one is supposed to use grades if not on the curve, but certainly some kind of reference group for grades should be specified.

Certain items showed a very strong negative response, particularly "Dormitories limited to blacks should be exempt from federal regulations barring discrimination" (1396 disagree). Other items showing a strong negative response are:

--The lay board of trustees is a concept that has outlived its usefulness (1221 disagree).

--Students should be actively involved in salary negotiations between faculty unions and institutions (1372 disagree).

--Faculties should not be expected to carry a teaching load of more than nine hours (1224 disagree).

--The present two-year and four-year degree programs should be replaced by a single three-year system (1395 disagree).

--Students should not be required to take general education courses (1374 disagree).

In addition to these items, there are certain other items on the questionnaire in which it is indicated that a fair number of respondents still have doubt and could not make up their minds. These items are quite interesting and indicate the ambiguities that are still prevalent in the field. These items include:

--A garbage collector in New York City makes as much as most junior college teachers, and probably deserves to (308 could not make up their mind on that item).

--Faculty tend to resist mandatory advance placement tests because such tests would probably decrease the number of faculty positions (485 could not make up their mind on that one). (There is a confusion in the way the item is stated, which may be responsible.)

--Regional accrediting agencies have done more to stifle innovation than they have done to foster it (369 could not make up their mind on that).

--In ten years, post-secondary education institutions will be training more people in health-related fields than in any other area (563 could not make up their mind on that item).

--Vocational schools are coming to have a disproportionate influence on the 1202 Commissions (1030 could not make up their mind).

--Post secondary education in the U.S. is probably more innovative than post-secondary education in any other country (448 could not make up their mind).

--State coordination of post-secondary education should be replaced by regional coordination (345 could not make up their mind).

In reviewing these answers to the questionnaire items, certain overall tendencies seem to be present. First of all, administrators are not terribly radical regarding the need for continuous educational reform. In general, the respondents seem to feel that meaningful changes did happen during the '60s, and that the changes that have been made thus far are reasonable responses to those pressures. It is not clear, however, that continued adaptability of the system seems to be uppermost in the minds of most of the respondents. Rather the answers tend to indicate a greater efficiency of the system as it is now, clarifying responsibilities, increasing faculty loads where this is possible and trying generally to get greater efficiency out of the system. It may be that these answers reflect a charactwristic administrati point of view, which certainly would be suggested by the overwhelming majority of administrators in the respondent category. On the other hand, few differences emerge when the data are analyzed by age, sex, or highest degree of institution. The primary concern, then, seems to be with "settling in," making the innovations and changes that are now installed on college and university campuses work, and making them work more effectively.

n=1701

KEY ISSUES: A SURVEY OF AAHE MEMBERS

Please complete and return by February 7, 1975

The statements in this survey were developed from issues that will be taken up directly or indirectly at the 30th National Conference on Higher Education. Whether you plan to attend the conference or not, we would like to know where you stand on the issues. (If you would like to know where others stand, you are welcome to run off copies of the survey and administer it yourself.) The results of the survey will be reported at the conference and in an issue of CUB following the conference. There is no name blank to fill out, so all responses will remain anonymous.

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1. Age:

1.1 193 20-30 1.3 525 41-50 1.5 96 Over 60
1.2 532 31-40 1.4 341 51-60
7.75 22.5 n=1687

2. Sex:

2.1 1295 Male 2.2 375 Female n=1670

3. Type of institution:

3.1 947 Public 3.3 224 Denominational 1688
3.2 421 Independent 3.4 76 Non-degree granting

4. Highest degree offered:

4.1 88 None 4.3 275 BA 4.5 757 PhD or EdD
4.2 185 AA 4.4 341 MA 1652

5. Your primary role:

5.1 182 Department chairman 5 5.6 112 Professor, other 6.6
5.2 1134 Administrator 67.3 5.7 66 Higher educ. research 3.9
5.3 6 Trustee .3 5.8 88 Grad. student 5.2
5.4 21 Professor, elementary or secondary educ. .1 5.9 3 Undergraduate .1
n=1685
5.5 92 Professor, higher educ. 5 5.0 78 Other 4.6

Please check the response that most nearly corresponds to your own view.

	1 Agree	2 Disagree	3 No opinion
6. Institutions of higher education should provide prospective students with accurate information regarding employment in their chosen fields.	1547	108	36
7. The reforms in higher education in the sixties were mainly transitory.	608	905	162
8. Most students would benefit from an extended period of time away from formal schooling.	1108	421	157
9. An institution should provide its students complete access to their own records.	985	656	51
10. Students today are generally more sophisticated about an institution's relevance to their training and future employment than they were ten years ago.	1092	528	78
11. College is no place to teach someone to read.	781	864	42
12. A garbage collector in New York City makes as much as most junior college teachers, and probably deserves to.	439	921	308
13. Dormitories limited to blacks should be exempt from federal regulations barring discrimination.	191	1396	107
14. Every school with an ROTC department should also have, or be receptive to having, a peace and conflict resolution department.	618	811	274
15. Faculty tend to resist mandatory advance placement tests because such tests would probably decrease the number of faculty positions.	466	739	485
16. Universities should offer specialties in skilled blue-collar occupations so that students can take both vocational and liberal arts courses—without feeling compelled to choose one at the expense of the other.	751	856	79
17. Given the state of the economy, current student aid policies make it harder for the middle class to go to college than either the very rich or the very poor.	1368	261	65
18. Regional accrediting agencies have done more to stifle innovation than they have to foster it.	701	625	369
19. Prospective faculty should be required to teach "live" students as part of the final interview process.	849	599	248
20. The move toward a learning society is lessening the importance of academic honors.	635	804	245
21. As colleges strive to serve a "new clientele" there will be a lessening of emphasis on the arts in higher education.	652	916	123
22. In ten years, postsecondary institutions will be training more people in health-related fields than in any other area.	463	663	563
23. Legislation should be enacted to require a public listing of any vacancies that occur on a college or university campus.	552	954	186
24. Credentialling should not be a function of higher education.	472	1019	196
25. The lay board of trustees is a concept that has outlived its usefulness.	302	1221	168
26. College and university enrollments will not be larger in ten years than they are now.	955	601	133
27. Students should be actively involved in salary negotiations between faculty unions and institutions.	237	1372	88

	1 Agree	2 Dis-agree	3 No opinion
28. As admissions standards are lowered, academic standards are likely to become lower too.	1103	537	36
29. Standard letter grades are still the most useful way to evaluate student performance.	914	685	71
30. Graduate teaching assistants should have the right to unionize.	643	760	275
31. All four-year colleges in a state system should accept total transfer credits from junior colleges in the system.	965	620	91
32. Female students should not be excluded from the military academies because of their sex.	1321	250	106
33. Vocational schools are coming to have a disproportionate influence on the 1202 Commissions.	364	275	103
34. Faculty should not be expected to carry a teaching load of more than nine hours.	339	1224	103
35. Most college trustees have little real influence on policy matters.	587	936	154
36. Higher education is one of the most poorly researched areas in all of education.	959	516	201
37. Of the potentially useful research conducted in higher education, very little is ever applied.	1273	222	178
38. Most decisions about appointments are made before an institution advertises vacancies in administrative or teaching positions.	676	750	249
39. Postsecondary education in the U.S. is probably more innovative than postsecondary education in any other country.	888	330	448
40. Efforts to serve or please a potential learner clientele have gone too far. It's time for the pendulum to begin swinging back the other way.	524	969	171
41. The present two-year and four-year degree programs should be replaced by a single three-year degree system.	102	1395	176
42. All degree-granting institutions should have procedures for crediting life experience.	1006	583	83
43. Most reforms in higher education are not really motivated by a desire to increase learner benefits.	814	647	207
44. Just as students can elect courses, they should be allowed to choose the kind of evaluation procedure they think is best for them.	416	1159	97
45. Students should not be required to take general education courses.	229	1374	68
46. Grading on the curve is not a fair way to measure learning.	1136	421	106
47. Faculty tenure systems should be replaced by renewable contract systems.	1152	399	120
48. Student aid should be given directly to students, not channeled through institutions.	749	772	145
49. Many black colleges have lost their reason for survival now that blacks have more access to other institutions.	491	962	220
50. State coordination of postsecondary education should be replaced by regional coordination.	444	876	345

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